The Sociophonetics of Sexuality, Gender, and Gender Identity: Acquisition and Processing across the Lifespan

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Abstract:
Men and women speak differently. While many (if not most) of these differences are due to sexual dimorphism of the speech-production mechanism, there are numerous speech differences that appear to be linguistically and culturally conventional, learned behaviors. Moreover, the growing body of literature documenting differences in speech between gay/lesbian, and heterosexual individuals appear unlikely to be grounded in anatomical or physiological differences, instead reflecting learned behaviors. This talk will review two recent studies in my research lab investigating the sociophonetics of gender and sexuality. The first study examines speech differences between boys with and without gender dysphoria (Munson, Crocker, Pierrehumbert, Owen-Anderson, & Zucker, 2015). This study found that boys with gender dysphoria as young as five years of age speak different from boys without. The nature and consequences of these differences will be discussed. The second study examines whether children with speech sound disorder have less gender-typical speech than their peers with typical speech production. Throughout this talk, I will emphasize how studies of socially meaningful linguistic variation fit in to broader models of language production and comprehension, including those used to describe atypical speech and language. [Work funded by NSF]

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Chair: Dr Shelley Tong

About the speaker:
Benjamin Munson is a Professor in the Department of Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences at University of Minnesota. He received a B.A. in linguistics from State University of New York at Buffalo in 1992, an M.A. in Speech-Language Pathology, and a Ph.D. in Speech and Hearing Science at Ohio State University. His research covers two broad themes. The first of these is how phonological acquisition and word learning interact in children. This research considers children acquiring a variety of languages, and children both with and without communication disorders. The second line of research examines the acquisition and processing of socially meaningful linguistic variation across the lifespan. This research has a specific focus on phonetic variation that conveys gender identity and sexual orientation. He is the author of 55 peer-reviewed articles and 26 chapters and proceedings papers. He is the former associate editor for Journal of the Acoustical Society of America and Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, and is currently a member of a scientific review panel for the National Institutes of Health (US).